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THE JAPANESE IN HAWAII . . . *Robert Brownell*

Has California short-changed itself in its treatment of Japanese-Americens? Have we been realistic and smart and as helpful as possible to the war effort? The following interview with Remington Stone of Sierra Madre who recently returned from twenty months in the Hawaiian Islands where he was assistant to the U. S. Army deputy district engineer, may help to disgorge the mind of the press-contaminated mainlander of many inaccuracies. Inasmuch as ninety per cent of the tremendous fortification and construction job accomplished in the Islands was done by civilian labor, Stone was well acquainted, not only with the tasks accomplished, but with the Japanese and Japanese-American workers who comprised a major part of the civilian labor force.

REMINGTON STONE is not even faintly surprised at the amazing fighting record hung up in Italy by American soldiers of Japanese descent recruited from Hawaii.

In appearance these rugged youngsters are as Japanese as the emperor himself, yet they are giving their lives daily in the roughest sort of mountain fighting against the Germans.

The point is, says Stone, Americans of Japanese descent are apt to be even more American than a Caucasian American.

To back up his statement Stone quotes Capt. Jack Burns of the espionage bureau of the Honolulu police department:

"Burns knows if anybody does—and Burns says he has found no difference between Japanese Americans and any other Americans—except that many of them have a greater appreciation of their citizenship."

Stone is familiar with the records of many of the Americans of Japanese ancestry—AJA's, he calls them—who have distinguished themselves in Italy.

Corp. Kentoku Nakasone, for instance, now over the shellshock suffered as result of almost incredible deeds of heroism. Nakasone saw his wounded platoon sergeant lying out in the open unable to protect himself. With a pal, who was killed in action, he left his foxhole, crossed the area of bursting shells, brought his leader back.

Or, again, the eleven men in appearance all just as Japanese as Tojo—photographed beneath a tree in Italy a month or so ago. They were all that was left of a platoon that accomplished its mission—securing an Italian road junction defended by machine guns.

It is Stone's opinion that the West Coast has shortchanged itself in its handling of the Japanese problem; that if at the beginning of the war, and later, the goal had been to gain the greatest possible contribution to the war from these people, everybody would now be better off.

Stone went to the Islands in April following the Pearl Harbor disaster, presumably for a two weeks' stay to "clean up some contracts." The construction and fortification job (Stone says) called for the immediate utilization of tens of thousands of green workers as carpenters, mechanics and plumbers, and was a program that couldn't have been carried through without the organizing and engineering skill of two men—nor without the unstinting participation of Japanese and AJA's living there.

The two men are Col. Wimer, and Wimer's superior, Brig. Gen. Hans Kramer, engineer for the entire central Pacific area.

Lt. Gen. Delos C. Emmons, now in charge of the Western Defense Command and his staff determined what work was to be done. Kramer decided what work should be done by military and what by civilian workers. Wimer handled the civilian work.

Equipment was disorganized, much of it wrecked. Even such materials as rock and timber were scarce. There were few trucks and practically no repair facilities.

"That was the situation after Pearl Harbor," said Stone, "yet today the job is well 'over the hump'—definitely to the point where, should a Japanese expeditionary force return, it would get a pasting that would make Midway seem like a picnic.

"There are about 126,000 AJA's in the Islands—out of a total population of about 480,000. There are also about 34,000 Japanese aliens—persons denied U. S. citizenship by law because they were born outside the country. Yet there is no Japanese problem."

That is, Stone continued, because of the very level-headed leadership of Gen. Emmons, now in charge of the Western Defense Command; and because of the refusal of the people of the Islands to allow themselves to be stampeded into hysteria.

Half the craftsmen, eighty per cent of the mechanics and carpenters and corresponding percentages of other workers in the vital construction program have been Japanese or AJA's. Much of the work was let out to Japanese or AJA contractors. Many of the Army engineers' superintendents have been Japanese or AJA's.

A tremendous movement of laborers—again, Japanese or AJA—took place from the plantations to the vital construction projects. They moved in just as rapidly as they could be utilized.

Stone's answer to stories of sabotage:

"In my job I came in close contact with the FBI, military intelligence and the espionage bureau of the Honolulu police department. The first two agencies agreed with Captain Burns that there was no sabotage by Japanese or Japanese American residents before December 7, on it or afterwards.

Stories dissolved upon investigation.

A Japanese reported sending messages on a pole turned out to be a man repairing a short on a power line. A Japanese reported sending signals from a hillside by means of a sheet turned out to be a newspaper stuck on some bushes.

Stone added that when General Emmons called for volunteers, every AJA member of the police force volunteered. (The force contained fifty-five AJA members at the time of Pearl Harbor; AJA police were seventy-six a year later.)

Emmons called for 1,500 volunteers. Nearly 10,000 responded, of which 2,600 were accepted. The same ratio of volunteers on the mainland would have resulted in a total of 8,000,000.

Among the workers, when they were appealed to for help in harvesting the coffee crop for the Army, 450 families voluntarily dropped work at $5 to $7 a day weaving handbags to pick coffee over a three-month period for $2 to $2.50 a day.

On December 7 the University of Hawaii ROTC was mobilized as Hawaiian territorial guards and used to protect vital military installations. Most of them were AJA's. They were inactivated in February, for fear soldiers from the mainland might mistake them for Japanese troops.

In a letter to General Emmons they expressed their deep disappointment, declared they had but one loyalty—to the Stars and Stripes—and offered

themselves "for whatever service you may see fit to use us."

They were incorporated into a labor battalion.

In Stone's opinion it's as simple as this: They were treated as Americans, they responded in kind.

"Oh yes," he added, "you might be interested in one other item. The first Japanese prisoner captured in the Islands was a member of a midget submarine crew. An AJA captured him."

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REMINGTON STONE is glad to be back with his family, but he isn't happy about the way the Japanese problem has been handled here.

Stone believes that an account of the way the Japanese and AJA's were dealt with in the Islands immediately after Pearl Harbor and during ensuing months up to the present "might possibly help the people of California see more clearly what the Japanese problem is and what it isn't."

He's pretty certain it isn't what "distorted and unobjective newspaper accounts and legislative 'investigators' have led many people to believe."

Immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Stone said, a group of persons were rounded up. Beside consular officers, immediately taken into protective custody, those detained were largely of four groups:

Shinto priests, many of whom had arrived from Japan in very recent years, after indoctrination in their homeland; teachers in Japanese language schools, also largely recent arrivals and thoroughly indoctrinated; Kibei, or Japanese youths who had returned to Japan for education, had been indoctrinated and then come back; and some businessmen, economically tied to the ruling regime in Japan. The group detained was not large, and many of those picked up were released after investigation.

The considerable numbers of Japanese and AJA fishermen operating around the Islands were withdrawn for obvious reasons.

On December 8 the only special regulation ever issued specifically affecting the Japanese and AJA's was announced: They must preserve peace, refrain from hostility, or giving the enemy information, aid, or comfort.

"So long as they shall conduct themselves in accordance with law," the military announcement read, "they shall be undisturbed in the peaceful pursuit of their lives and occupations."

There were cases of discrimination, such as the dismissing of servants, immediately after Pearl Harbor, and fear naturally grew among the Japanese and AJA's that they might become scapegoats for the accumulated resentment of the rest of the people.

By radio shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack, Emmons, as military governor of the Islands, appealed to the "loyal citizens of all racial groups," telling them they "must work and fight together to the end."

On December 19, Emmons spoke again by radio, this time sharply criticizing the indiscriminate displacement of labor. "We cannot afford," he said, "to unnecessarily and indiscriminately keep a large number of loyal workers from useful employment."

The AJA's themselves had not been idle. In February, following the Pearl Harbor disaster, a committee of twelve AJA's with an advisory group of forty-four, formed to cooperate with military authorities, increase demonstrations of AJA loyalty, promote a "speak American" campaign, and encourage the voluntary dissolution of Shinto temples and Japanese language schools.

A volunteer group of thirty-six members of this AJA committee also assisted the Army Signal Corps in the task of dismantling all non-military shortwave radio sets.

Still another group that promoted understanding and helped prevent hysteria and unintelligent mob thinking in the crisis had been formed before December 7, composed of business, educational and religious leaders. Its purpose was to prevent ruptures in interracial solidarity; it operated with the approval of the Army, the Navy and the FBI.

After war began, Emmons appointed three members of this committee to the public morale section of his office as military governor. Those appointed were one each of Caucasian, Chinese and Japanese ancestry, and their announced goal was to get everyone into the scheme of national defense.

Or, in the trio's own words: 'To make clear that loyalty grows only when it is given a chance to grow. It does not flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion, discrimination, and denial of opportunities to practice that loyalty."

That, concluded Stone, was expressing the problem and its solution just about as well as it could be done.

Lack of this realization in handling the problem on the mainland had, he thought, shortchanged everybody concerned in six important respects:

1. Caused a severe loss to the war effort by stranding and forbidding a contribution from 10,000 or more persons, most of whom, from the very first, wanted to contribute to Allied Victory.

2. Caused a loss to Californians, particularly, in vegetables and other truck crops.

3. Created the expensive enterprise of maintaining this large group of persons in idleness.

4. Created another expensive enterprise—prospective support of many of them after they are finally released, because they will have no savings.

5. Endangered what morale may remain intact in these interned citizens by keeping them stranded when industry is crying for help.

6. Created a dangerous precedent: If one group of loyal Americans can be moved about, stranded in camps or disenfranchised and deprived of income and means of livelihood through group hysteria or pressure from an organized minority, so can any other group of us.

So far as we could see, Stone said, the military need for segregation of loyal Americans of Japanese ancestry was now over—"if indeed it ever existed."

If time had proved it unnecessary on a group of islands in mid-Pacific where the Japanese and AJA population constituted more than a third of the entire population, he found himself forced to conclude that the present attitude on the mainland was "somewhat unreal."

Stone is now on medical furlough, does not plan to return to the Islands because there are too many flowers.

He doesn't like to admit it, but they gave him asthma.

He expects to do some lecturing before engineering and other professional groups, then will go back to work—"probably in production rather than construction."

Stone's last holiday dinner was in the Islands—Thanksgiving—which he ate as the guest of some Japanese.

"Very Oriental it was," he says wryly. "Turkey, curled celery, Parker-house rolls, salad, and pumpkin pie."